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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003330

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SHARIA PROFS DISMISSED, SOME REINSTATED; MYSTIFIED  
JORDANIANS BLAME THE USG

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM. REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY. Three Jordanian universities recently dismissed 8 professors, most of whom were Sharia professors, without explanation. Most suspect the professors were dismissed because of their political views and/or their background as Saudi-educated 'Salafi' proponents. Media reports and embassy sources indicate that four of those dismissed have since been reinstated. As there is no clear explanation for the dismissals or subsequent reinstatements, the Jordanian academic and political communities have been left mystified, with many pointing, by default, to the USG as somehow responsible. END SUMMARY.

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PROFESSORS DISMISSED FROM SHARIA FACULTY  
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2. (C) At the beginning of June, Jordan University, Mu'tah University and Yarmouk University dismissed a total of seven professors from their Sharia faculties (JU dismissed a professor from its school of humanities as well). All of the Sharia professors dismissed were trained in Saudi Arabia in the Salafi school of thought. Fawzi Samhoury (protect) a long-standing and reliable human rights contact, reports that despite media characterizations of the group as 'moderates', in reality several of the professors had been preaching a markedly virulent and anti-USG strain of Salafi thought prior to their dismissals. A few, such as Dr. Ali Al-Otoun (fired from Yarmouk University) have long-standing ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. That said, not all of the 8 professors could be characterized as political extremists. Predictably, Jordanians who are stridently anti-USG are more likely to characterize the group as 'moderates'. In a June 13 meeting with POLOFF, an anti-USG, US-educated sociology professor reported that the group as whole was moderate, and that a couple of the dismissed professors were so docile that many had believed them to be "operatives" of the GOJ. (NOTE: This contact, after a short discussion of the dismissed professors, used the remainder of the meeting as an opportunity to revel in a hyperbolic rant against the USG).

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REACTION: UNCLE SAM DID IT  
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3. (C) As is usually the case with government intervention in the universities, the dismissals received scant media coverage, but have become a major topic of conversation in political circles. Dr. Ahmad al-Awayishah (dismissed from JU) was quoted by the IAF weekly al-Sabil, saying "We will continue to say that the people who carry out the martyrdom operations are martyrs, who will be rewarded by almighty God". Both contacts above reported that, without a clear explanation for the dismissals, people by default blame the USG war on terrorism for the actions, with a conspiracy theory now afloat that points the finger at the CIA. A well-connected and Islamic-leaning newspaper editor told us the dismissals "clumsy" and ill-informed, and noted that more radical voices in the university had not been touched. Like most Jordanians, he assumed the U.S. was somehow behind the dismissals.

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REINSTATEMENT, FOR FOUR  
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4. (C) In yet another twist, during the third week of June, four of the professors (3 from JU and 1 from Mu'tah) were 'reinstated'. Samhoury confirmed that those reinstated were the most moderate of the group, and the ones whose dismissals had left him most confused. Still, he remained concerned that there has been no formal explanation about why any of the dismissals or reinstatements occurred. The IAF called for the immediate reinstatement of the four who remain ousted, and questioned the constitutionality of their dismissals in the June 18 issue of al-Sabeel. As a result of these seemingly arbitrary dismissals/reinstatements, professors report a sharpened concern about government intervention and intimidation within the academic community.

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COMMENT

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15. (C) The fact that all 8 professors were dismissed at the same time and from different universities has predictably raised suspicions that this is part of an orchestrated campaign to rid the academic community of undesirable, extremist voices. This, coupled with animosity toward USG policies in the region, has led many critics to conclude that the USG is in some way involved in the dismissals.

Gnehm